



STRATEGIC PLAN

12/12/2022

The Illinois Reentry Council is a body composed of over one hundred people from throughout Illinois committed to developing and supporting effective reentry supports and services for people with records. Chaired by a diverse group of individuals, including people with lived experience and leaders in state government, the Council holds influence over the policies and practices listed in this strategic plan that impact the lives of returning residents. The Council's co-chairs include Director Yaacov Delaney (JEO Initiative, Lt. Gov.'s Office), Chairman King Harris (IL Housing Development Authority), Secretary Grace Hou (IL Dept. of Human Services), Director Rob Jeffreys (IL Dept. of Corrections), Marlon Chamberlain (Heartland Alliance), and Ahmadou Dramé (Illinois Justice Project). These individuals work alongside the Council to implement the priorities for action and execute the Council's goals.

Members include people who have been incarcerated, those elected and appointed with authority to change the operation of existing systems, advocates, those representing groups like realtors and local mayors, service providers, academics, and those representing philanthropy. The power of this Council is derived from the shared commitment of its members to create enduring and effective reentry supports and processes for all people who have been incarcerated. While some members wield power in government, others have the knowledge necessary to design practical policies, practices, and programs; others can provide necessary services or find housing; others can mobilize public will; and others can produce potent research to establish elements for and measurements of success. Only through the combined efforts and mutual respect of its members is change possible.

Council members participate in a transformative, holistic, and asset-based approach to reentry by addressing structural barriers that impede one's reintegration, fostering collaboration, following the leadership of system-impacted individuals, emphasizing the intersectionality in how individuals are impacted, and ensuring self-determination is infused within reentry policies, programming, and practices. Transformative reentry requires acknowledging the disenfranchisement and marginalization of formerly incarcerated people and removing obstacles by building empowering supports through cultural, narrative, and structural changes.

As the Council enters its second year, this plan will provide a framework for implementation of a strengthened network of reentry policies and practices. The reentry plan reflects on-going work in Illinois and is intended to be complementary and supportive, not exclusive of other efforts. It will remain flexible and subject to change as the Council refines its work and as opportunities for change present themselves.

The purpose of the Council is to:

- Identify institutional and systemic barriers to reentry and devise policies and practices to circumvent or eliminate those obstacles.
- Identify other common challenges individuals face in reentry and collaborate to eliminate those barriers.

- Review information and hear from stakeholders about various aspects of reentry in Illinois and about reentry resources in other jurisdictions which might offer innovative ideas that could be applicable to Illinois.
- Equip IRC members with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for improved reentry in Illinois.
- Create and oversee this strategic plan to guide the Council’s work, including an annual review that evaluates its progress.
- Devise and oversee implementation of policies and practices which will permit all people to successfully reenter communities from incarceration.
- Create a forum and website where people interested in strengthening reentry processes and supports can meet one another and share information about their goals and methods for achieving the goals.

The Council includes six workgroups which:

- Define specific elements of reentry to be addressed in the workgroup, incorporate those in the strategic plan, and implement the policies and practices within the strategic plan.
- Learn from experts about best practices to execute and evaluate the implementation of the workgroups’ and overarching Illinois Reentry Council’s goals. Engage members of the Council and external partners with subject-matter expertise to understand the goals and to implement those aspects which they can impact.
- Collaborate with other workgroups where issues overlap.

Years Two and Three of IRC Workgroups

Goals and objectives of workgroups:

Economic Opportunity and Upward Mobility (Co-Chair: Michael Cannon – Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Matthew McFarland – Lawndale Christian Legal Center)

- 1) Develop regional strategies among Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and Illinois Department of Correction (IDOC) to significantly increase access to training and employment resources.
 - a. Leverage knowledge of DCEO regional managers and IDOC reentry coordinators to codify localized strategies that will include:
 - i. Enrolling local workforce boards and Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) to increase access to staff and resources within IDOC facilities.
 - ii. Assessing potential partners to bring employer-led direct training to IDOC facilities.
 - iii. Identifying potential IDOC facilities and employer partners that are well-positioned to pilot day-release programs (likely limited in scale).
- 2) Educate employers in high-potential industries on employing individuals with records, to build increased interest and commitments.
 - a. Develop a detailed understanding of current employer perspectives on hiring individuals with records, including common misconceptions and concerns.
 - b. Codify a detailed “employer messaging toolkit” to build awareness on challenges faced by individuals with records, address common employer hesitations, and inform on incentives / tools available to employers.

- c. Design and launch targeted campaigns to enroll employers to creating quality, family-sustaining jobs for individuals with records.
- 3) Influence key employers interested in hiring people with records to reform internal hiring and onboarding processes to specifically support the needs of returning individuals.
 - a. Understand in detail the common challenges faced by returning individuals in the job search, application, and onboarding processes.
 - b. Partner with a cohort of committed employers to codify common internal challenges faced by companies when creating specific initiatives for individuals with records, and best practices for improving company processes such that individuals with records can succeed.
 - c. Craft and launch targeted, employer-to-employer, peer campaigns to educate each other and support implementation of best-in-class practices.
- 4) Explore potential for bringing the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) to Illinois, so that the prevailing wage for employment during incarceration is improved.
 - a. Develop a comprehensive fact base on PIECP, including perspectives from incarcerated individuals on improving work programs, to inform if advocacy for PIECP should be prioritized in the near-term.
 - b. If PIECP is a prioritized near-term effort, pre-emptively identify employers who would be interested in using PIECP to create roles within DOC facilities.
 - c. Then, craft targeted advocacy campaign to enroll critical private and public stakeholders who are well-positioned to champion PIECP implementation.
- 5) Increase access to relevant asset-based post-secondary education programs inside of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and local jail facilities.
 - a. Engage accredited education institutions (public and private 2-year and 4-year schools, trade schools, etc.), employers, foundations, financial experts (i.e., banks, community development financial institutions, foundations), community-based organizations, families, friends, and services networks to develop workforce and academic programs useful for people who will be exiting jails and prisons.
 - b. Further engage those partners to develop seamless continuation of that programming in communities.
- 6) Support the recommendations of the Higher Education in Prison Task Force and ensure that adult technical and post-secondary education credentials from IDOC and local jail programs are transferable to accredited institutions and recognized by industries.
 - a. Ensure that those institutions are equipped to support the success of people leaving incarceration.
- 7) Support communications and connections between education institutions—especially those operating within prisons and jails—and employers to develop programming that meets interests of currently incarcerated individuals, fosters job placements, and ensures that the material being taught qualifies an individual to work within the related industry or job.
- 8) Support entrepreneurial initiatives and programs, with a focus on those founded or led by individuals with records.
- 9) Support and engage in work being done to provide living wages to those who are incarcerated and have been incarcerated.
- 10) Develop a strategy for effectively utilizing PELL dollars when they become available again in June 2023.
- 11) Catalog current state, county and city spending on reentry employment and education services and supports to assess where additional resources are needed.

Public Agencies' Practices, Policies and Programming (Co-Chairs: Reality Richard Lovett – READI, Heartland Alliance; Jennifer Parrack – Illinois Department of Corrections; Nneka Jones Tapia – Chicago Beyond)

- 1) Adopt and implement an asset-based and trauma-informed approach (models and practices) to support people entering and exiting prisons and jails that includes staff at facilities.
 - a. Incorporate humanizing, identity-recognizing, and people-centered language.
- 2) Implement policies and practices that prioritize and support people in custody to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with families, support networks and community-based organizations in the communities to which they will return.
 - a. Identify and adopt policies and practices for visitation, telephone, and family-organized events that are uniform across facilities.
 - b. Develop metrics that allow these policies and practices to be evaluated.
- 3) Reform or eliminate Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR) as conditions of compliance with MSR can create obstacles to securing housing and employment, and to [re-] establishing healthy connections in the community.
 - a. Create a subgroup that regularly reports into the workgroup on discussions, learnings and progress on this recommendation.
- 4) Engage with various state, county, and city departments, boards, and agencies to (1) inform and educate leadership and staff on reentry and current landscape; (2) identify policies, practices, and programs that can be developed or amended to better serve individuals reentering communities; (3) identify gaps and barriers within their services and programming to broaden access; (4) facilitate effective communication and information sharing among departments and agencies. Such departments and agencies include but are not limited to:
 - a. Department on Aging (IDOA):
 - i. Develop educational materials and opportunities for service providers to better understand the context of reentry and experiences of older adults reentering.
 - b. Secretary of State (SOS):
 - i. Monitor, support the implementation of, and assist in developing solutions to barriers of the state ID program that the Secretary of State facilitates in partnership with IDOC.
 - c. Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS):
 - i. Monitor and support the implementation of Medicaid enrollment within IDOC, Cook County Jail, and other jails.
 - d. Department of Public Health (IDPH):
 - i. Address barriers to accessing nursing homes faced by people with records, especially as it relates to finding placements for individuals leaving IDOC under the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act.
 - e. Department of Human Services (IDHS):
 - i. Support and monitor their work with IDOC on enrollment in SNAP, vocational training for people with disabilities, and determining Medicaid eligibility on behalf of IDHFS.
 - ii. Establish a position with responsibilities and authority over reentry in DHS.
 - f. Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR)
 - i. Monitor and support the elimination of barriers to accessing occupational licensing; and identify and eliminate discriminatory practices of insurance and background check companies which create obstacles to employment.

- g. Prisoner Review Board (PRB)
 - i. Explore whether the Parole Division of IDOC and PRB are playing productive roles in helping individuals secure education and find and maintain employment.
- 5) Monitor and support engagement of public agencies in activities of other workgroups that relate to workgroup topics (Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois Housing Development Authority, etc.).
- 6) Support and monitor implementation of the [Joe Coleman Medical Release Act \(JCMR\)](#) across the Prisoner Review Board and IDOC, as well as agencies that can be engaged in implementation, such as IDPH.

Special Considerations Populations (Co-Chairs: Willette Benford – Office of the Mayor of Chicago; Colette Payne – Women’s Justice Institute; Alyssa Williams – Illinois Department of Corrections)

Members identified the following populations as priorities in addressing special considerations through the development of policies and practices:

- LGBTQIA2S+ & gender-nonconforming individuals;
 - Aging and elderly individuals;
 - Seriously mentally ill and those with substance use disorder and other disabilities;
 - People subject to state banishment laws;
 - Women;
 - Individuals with children/other dependents;
 - Individuals who are undocumented;
 - Veterans;
 - Individuals with various medical conditions; Youth;
 - Emerging adults;
 - Individuals with experience with the child welfare system;
 - People who have served/are serving long and extremely long sentences (20 years+);
 - Survivors of domestic violence; and
 - People listed on public conviction registries
- 1) Collaborate and advise other workgroups to ensure that housing, support services, and economic opportunities are equitably accessible to individuals with special considerations – especially those with high needs – and focus on long-term solutions to the barriers they face. This collaboration will be created by providing guidance to and attending the meetings of the Housing, Support Services, and Economic Opportunity and Upward Mobility workgroups. This workgroup will also work with organizations who have well-rounded understandings of the experiences of people in particular special considerations groups (e.g., the Task Force of Children with Incarcerated Parents and Children’s Best Interest Project).
 - 2) Determine what currently incarcerated individuals' needs, interests, and concerns are prior to their release and integrate their responses in the IRC’s work, especially directed to the appropriate workgroup.
 - a. Develop and distribute a survey within IDOC that captures this feedback from individuals with the identities specifically outlined in each group.
 - b. Design educational materials and learning opportunities for Council members and interested external partners centered on characteristics and populations of focus (such as gender-responsive programming, service delivery, etc.). Identify and engage subject matter experts

(impacted individuals, organizations, etc.) to co-design and develop such materials and learning opportunities.

- 3) Refine the list of policy and practice changes for each consideration listed and identify prioritization for the workgroup to adhere to.

Financing for Reentry (Co-Chairs: Mark Angelini – Mercy Housing; Michael Goldberg – IFF; Floyd Stafford – Steans Family Foundation)

- 1) Identify and influence the flow of new and existing resources to support effective and promising approaches that help people with records successfully reintegrate into society. Then monitor, track, and evaluate the effectiveness of these resources.
- 2) To support initiatives advanced by the other workgroups, identify, and pursue funding sources by developing a list of promising programs and initiatives that can be replicated or started across Illinois.
 - a. In conjunction with the Housing Workgroup, identify and pursue sources of funding for housing acquisition, rehab, and development (i.e., Real Estate Transfer Tax, R3 Funding, filing fees, etc.) to expand the supply of reentry housing available.
 - b. Assist the General Assembly and Governor in reallocating the savings from consolidating prisons and juvenile facilities to support reentry.
- 3) In the short term, in partnership with the Housing workgroup, influence American Rescue Plan Act spending so it funds the expansion of reentry housing supply with intentional support to organizations that provide services to people with records.
- 4) Explore Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) funding to support the work of the Economic Opportunities and Upward Mobility workgroup.

Housing (Co-Chairs: Gianna Baker – Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance; Richard Rowe – Corporation for Supportive Housing; Alan Zais – Northern Illinois Regional Affordable Community Housing)

- 1) Create a detailed, data-driven view of housing and support needs (*in partnership with Support Services working group*) of individuals preparing to exit incarceration.
 - a. Review and modify the existing Housing Discharge Planning Assessment, to ensure this tool appropriately allows jails and prisons to identify the housing needs of people in custody, prior to release.
 - b. Partner with IDOC to invest in the infrastructure (e.g., tablets, data integration) and people training (both IDOC staff and people preparing to exit) required to successfully drive usage of this tool at scale.
 - c. Build a comprehensive report on the scale of housing needed as well as the types of services required to effectively support individuals exiting incarceration.
- 2) Establish a clear vision and align political support for a housing continuum that will effectively bring the supply of reentry housing and support services to a level that fully addresses the spectrum of housing needs of people with records.
 - a. Outline the housing continuum, including the types of housing and associated services required, as well as a clear rationale for why each type is needed to serve people with records.
 - b. Identify and develop targeted advocacy campaigns towards certain critical stakeholders (public and private) well positioned to champion and support the development of this continuum.

- 3) Influence and incentivize landlords / owners of affordable housing to increase access to people with records.
 - a. Develop a detailed understanding of landlords / owners and their current rental practices (e.g., why they don't rent to this population today, what misconceptions exist, which forums can landlords be reached through at scale).
 - b. Codify a "Reentry Housing Messaging Toolkit", which strives to address the most common hesitations and misconceptions they have and builds awareness to the most effective tools and levers (e.g., incentives) available to landlords today.
 - c. Assess the landscape of existing fair housing protections and enforcement; identify mechanisms to expand protections via increased enforcement and / or expanded legislation.
 - d. Assess the effectiveness of existing landlord incentives and develop new incentives that address gaps and are more effective at driving landlord action.
- 4) Influence recipients of government funding (i.e., housing service providers) to remove criteria that are limiting to people impacted by the criminal legal system.
 - a. Develop a comprehensive fact base of the various sources of funding for each type of housing along the continuum, including a detailed understanding of funding allocation processes and restrictive criteria, to better understand where there is the greatest opportunity to improve access for people returning from prisons and jails.
 - b. Craft unique, targeted campaigns to advocate for funding that is more inclusive to people returning from prisons and jails, prioritizing those funders controlling the greatest share of housing currently in need.
- 5) Create a detailed "Opportunity Development Playbook" that can guide less experienced individuals (*particularly those who are previously incarcerated themselves*) and service providers in effectively navigating the process of creating / rehabilitating affordable housing.
 - a. Gather feedback from those less-experienced developers who have recently gone through the development process, to understand the primary challenges they faced and where additional guidance would have been most helpful.
 - b. Collect and synthesize existing guidance on navigating the development process, from agencies and organizations currently providing similar support to other audiences.
 - c. Develop communication strategies to identify and share the playbook broadly.
- 6) Identify affordable housing properties at highest risk of converting to market-rate and develop tailored strategies to ensure properties remain affordable.
 - a. Leverage publicly available data to understand which buildings are soon to be losing their Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) benefits, as these are properties most likely to convert to market-rate.
 - b. Develop additional methodologies to prioritize amongst these buildings (e.g., # of units, average income levels, etc.) and identify a manageable subset of properties to seek to maintain as affordable.
 - c. Develop targeted strategies specific to each property that can support units remaining affordable (e.g., aligning additional financial support, building community advocacy, identifying additional tenants).
- 7) Implement a centralized reentry housing database which captures the existing supply of accessible housing and programmatically supports more efficient matching of returning individuals with landlords who have previously indicated openness to housing people with criminal records.
 - a. Understand previous and current efforts to establish a centralized reentry housing database within IL / Chicago, as well as potential partners (e.g., Housing Connector, Google Housing Portal).
 - b. Align on critical requirements of database and identify potential technical partners capable of supporting the development of this technology.
 - c. Enroll groups of landlords interested in participating in such a database, as their buy-in will be critical to maintaining an effective system.

- 8) Monitor the implementation of state and local fair housing reforms (e.g., Cook County Just Housing Ordinance, the reentry housing amendment to the Illinois Human Rights Act) and determine whether additional changes to the text or implementation of these laws are necessary, or whether new laws are necessary.
- 9) In conjunction with the Special Considerations Population workgroup, advocate for reforms to housing banishment laws (restrictions to live 500 feet from a school, park, day care) that apply to individuals on public registries.

Support Services (Co-Chairs: Delrice Adams – Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority; Orlando Mayorga – Justice, Equity and Opportunity Initiative, Lt. Governor’s Office)

- 1) Create a coordinated network of localized supports and services that is readily accessible to formerly incarcerated individuals and their families whether immediately upon release or later during one’s reentry.
 - a. Collaboratively develop, maintain, and share a database of reentry programs, services, and related information easily available in Illinois that is widely accessible, including programs and services that are available to people, with an emphasis on voluntary services that are reflective of both needs and individuals’ personal goals.
 - b. Build capacity of community-based organizations that support individuals reentering in holistic, trauma-informed, and gender-responsive ways and through a solidarity approach.
 - c. Collaborate with IDOC Northern and Southern Reentry Managers on in-reach and connection to resources before leaving incarceration.
 - d. Engage individuals who have received supports and services as well as organizations which serve individuals reentering to identify and routinely update provided services based on challenges and successes experienced across the state.
 - i. Regionally convene groups of organizations and individuals to foster collaboration in a hub format. This hub format would include a central state-level stakeholder responsible for convening regions throughout Illinois, helping to coordinate their work, and providing any financial and legislative resources needed. These regions would be made up by government, non-profit, and community-based entities working together to provide supports and services according to the specific needs of each region.
- 2) Strengthen and construct permanent networks of social support for people reentering and their families, emphasizing methods of peer-support such as cohorts of individuals returning to the same community, connected both through community-based organizations or as individuals.
- 3) Prioritize physical and mental health services and social-emotional wellness support that is healing-centered and trauma-informed for individuals reentering.
- 4) Support and expand efforts to remove permanent punishments, monitor the effectiveness of those efforts in reducing the barriers individuals face across housing, employment, and other facets of reentry, and navigate permanent punishments while they exist. Then, use this information to strengthen the network of supports and services.

Conclusion

This plan is the product of the work of the members of the Illinois Reentry Council and includes their priorities and goals. As the Council members work together over the next several years to implement the priorities outlined here, they may decide to modify them or to delete or add other goals, depending on the evolution of this work. As opportunities arise, the Council will take advantage of them and move swiftly to move certain priorities forward. Some obstacles may be harder than others to overcome. For that reason, the members and staff will remain vigilant and persistent in implementation, waiting for values and circumstances to change to find the right times to advance priorities. Progress has already been made in areas listed in the strategic plan and the foundation has been laid for progress for many. The Annual Report in each of the coming years will document the accomplishments and changes needed in the strategic plan. Through this process, the Council envisions the creation of a vibrant, well-funded, accessible, humane, and equitable support system for all people who have been incarcerated in Illinois.